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FM AMEMBASSY ATHENS

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0490

INFO EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD 0002

RUEHTH/AMEMBASSY ATHENS

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ATHENS 001349

SIPDIS

AMEMBASSY ANKARA PASS TO AMCONSUL ADANA

AMEMBASSY ASTANA PASS TO USOFFICE ALMATY

AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL DUSSELDORF

AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL LEIPZIG

AMEMBASSY BELGRADE PASS TO AMEMBASSY PODGORICA

AMEMBASSY HELSINKI PASS TO AMCONSUL ST PETERSBURG

AMEMBASSY ATHENS PASS TO AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2019/07/29

TAGS: PTER PREL KCRM ASEC ABLD IZ GR

SUBJECT: GREECE DEPORTS IRAQI INSURGENT COMMANDER WHO ENTERED AS
ILLEGAL IMMIGRANT

REF: 08 ATHENS 1387

CLASSIFIED BY: Daniel V. Speckhard, Ambassador; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

Summary

¶1. (S) Greek authorities deported Iraqi citizen Mu'ammar Latif Karim (a.k.a. Abu Sajjad), accused of being a Shia insurgent commander responsible for IED and other attacks in Iraq, on July ¶21. We understand he was arrested by Iraqi authorities on his arrival by plane in Irbil July 22. Greek authorities originally picked up Abu Sajjad with a group of other illegal immigrants near the Turkish border in January, but Greek officials did not know his identity at the time and released him with an order to depart the country. He was arrested again in February in Athens, as a result of effective cooperation involving Greek law enforcement, representatives of a number of USG agencies located in both Greece and Iraq, and Iraqi authorities. This case resulted in the successful conclusion of Abu Sajjad ending up in Iraqi custody, but it also highlights the continuing danger of terrorists using the crowded migration route into Greece as a way to enter Europe. End Summary.

From Iraq to Greece...and Back

¶2. (S) According to separate sensitive reporting, the Greek border guard unit based in Didymoteicho, a Greek town in Western Thrace near the land border with Turkey, arrested Abu Sajjad and 22 other aliens on January 5, after they were spotted along the Didymoteicho-Alexandroupolis highway. Abu Sajjad was subsequently released from detention with an order to leave the country, as is typical for illegal aliens detained in Greece. Greek authorities re-arrested Abu Sajjad in Athens on February 14. Abu Sajjad reportedly claimed he was a Palestinian, something alien smugglers often coach illegal aliens to do in order to get a shorter detention period. After learning his real identity, authorities held him and two associates for false documents and other charges. The case received some minor press attention in Greece in March, although the story did not appear to draw significant attention from the Greek public at the time.

¶3. (S) The Iraqi government submitted an INTERPOL red notice on Abu Sajjad in March for "terrorist activities, kidnapping, killing, supplying explosives, and detonating explosives." Following complex Greek-Iraqi interactions which USG officials in Greece and Iraq facilitated by maintaining close contact with local partners, Greek authorities put Abu Sajjad on a plane late on July 21. We received information July 22 that he had been arrested by Iraqi authorities on his arrival in Irbil.

Comment

¶4. (C) Greek officials worked closely with the USG on this case, which was legally complicated and crossed multiple Greek and international jurisdictions that do not ordinarily cooperate easily. They deserve credit for successfully arresting and deporting Abu Sajjad, although as in other such sensitive counterterrorism cases, Greek officials prefer private and low-key credit vice public recognition. This case is a real-world example of the danger of extremists and terrorists taking advantage of the huge and growing waves of illegal migrants (tens of thousands in 2008) originating in conflict zones in the Middle East, transiting Turkey, and then entering the EU through Greece's mountainous land border or the thousands of islands in the Aegean (reftel). As we have noted before, these overwhelming numbers have left Greek officials in need of more help from the EU, including by strengthening the activities of FRONTEX on the Greek border. We

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believe it is in U.S. interests to support these efforts to the extent we can, including by building up programs on the basis of the new memorandum of agreement between DHS and FRONTEX. At the same time, the migration challenge is an important justification for our proposal for re-initiating a DS/ATA Anti-Terrorism Assistance program to train Greek law enforcement officials.
SPECKHARD